

Editorial - ought not to be seen
FIVE MINUTES ADVICE,

TO THE
PEOPLE
OF
GREAT BRITAIN,
ON THE
PRESENT
ALARMING SITUATION
OF
PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

IN WHICH
THE GOOD POLICY OF IMMEDIATE HOSTILITIES WITH
FRANCE IS CANDIDLY INVESTIGATED.

BY A CITIZEN OF LONDON.

"As a war should be undertaken only with a just and prudent motive, so it is still more obvious, that a Prince ought maturely to consider the condition he is in, when he enters on it; whether his coffers be full, his revenues clear of debts, his people numerous and rich by long peace and free trade, not overpressed with many burthenfome taxes; no violent faction ready to weaken his authority at home, and lessen his reputation abroad. For if the contrary of all this be the case, he will hardly be persuaded to disturb the world's quiet and his own, while there is any other way left of preserving the latter with honour and safety."

SWIFT.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATERNOSTER-ROW, 1792.



47
10 / 9
273

FIVE MINUTES ADVICE,

&c. &c. &c.

Countrymen, and Fellow Citizens.

I AM one of those who have associated for the support of our excellent Constitution, and for the loyal defence of his Majesty's person and Government. From this introduction you will perceive I am neither a Leveller nor a Republican; I am a true Churchman and a friend to my King. I am no member of any unconstitutional society at home; I have heard of the Jacobins through no other medium than that of the public

B

prints,

prints, and have heard of them only to execrate their principles and proceedings. But it is, because I am no Republican or Leveller; it is because I detest the principles of the Jacobins, and of those who have reduced the French nation to its present state of misery; it is because I love my King and Country, and *fear* for them, that I intreat your attention to a subject which involves all that is most dear to every one of us, the enjoyment of our liberties, our properties, perhaps our lives.

I shall not address you in the style which has been adopted by some late pamphleteers on the side of Government. To treat you as Children or ideots, is the clearest mark of a want of understanding in those who affect such language. I am myself *one of the people*, and I know, that whatever the populace of other nations may be, *Good Sense*, not less than good temper, is the characteristic of the *people* of Great Britain. Good sense does not necessarily imply classical or scholastic learning;

ing; it is a quality which attaches to almost all the sober, industrious, and regular members of every civilized community, and particularly of a commercial community like this. Your judgments are exercised frequently on matters the most important to your fellow citizens; when in discharging the solemn office of Jurymen you decide on their properties and their lives—and on these occasions your *understandings* are generally found to be not less sound and unperturbed than your integrity.

From the present aspect of public affairs, it appears to be the intention of ministry to engage the nation in immediate hostilities with France. War is always a consideration of the utmost magnitude to this country; it is doubly so at a period when the nation is overwhelmed with debts and TAXES, and when ministry themselves confess their apprehensions of a desperate faction, and, if we believe *their* representations, one not less

formidable for its numbers, than for its designs.

“ War,” says Dr. Johnson, is the extremity of evil: at the conclusion of a long war, how are we recompensed for the death of multitudes, and the expence of millions; but by contemplating the sudden glories of pay-masters and agents, contractors and commissioners, whose equipages shine like meteors, and whose palaces rise like exhalations.” Dr. Johnson was no Jacobin, but an admirer even to idolatry of Monarchical and Aristocratical Government; and why has he written thus, but from the conviction, that *War* is sooner or later the ruin of *every* Government?—That the fair trader, the respectable merchant, the industrious manufacturer, are beggared by it; that the community is overloaded with taxes; and that it only tends to increase an evil already too predominant, that of the *very unequal distribution of property*, by enriching a race
of

of harpies, contractors, commissaries and stock-jobbers.

We have therefore surely a right in *common sense*, in common justice, to put the questions—For what are we going to war? What shall *we* gain by it?

WHAT THEN ARE YOU TO GAIN BY A WAR WITH FRANCE?

France is a *Bankrupt*.—You, it is true, are in debt, but your trade is flourishing beyond example; your revenue is even increasing, and your income is above your expences. France exists at present in a state of anarchy—If let alone, a civil war is inevitable, her armies will starve; her eighty-four departments will become separate republics, and crumble into nothing; her ill-constituted Government (if it deserves the name) *must* fall by its own weight. You *cannot* gain any thing by attacking her *trade*, for she has none. You might, it is true, take some of her West-India islands—
But,

But, in their present state, would they be an acquisition? Would you engraft the spirit of rebellion which prevails in them upon your own peaceable and flourishing colonies. What would the owners and mortgagees of West-India estates say to so unlawful an infringement upon a monopoly which you have granted *them*, because the sole benefit redounds to yourselves? In 1763 we know the clamour they raised; when Martinico was to be retained, and the only reasonable plea that was urged by Lord Bute for the peace which he concluded was, that to have retained any of the French or Spanish West-India possessions, must have reduced to ruin and bankruptcy our own planters, &c.

In a word, France is precisely in the situation of a ruined Gambler, on the point of committing suicide, who challenges to a duel a Gentleman of fortune, with a large family depending on him, and with every
comfort

comfort to satisfy his wishes. In such a case is it prudent, think you, to accept the challenge?

France, if left to herself, must inevitably sink into nothing; her intestine factions and divisions must soon break forth into a devouring flame—Her debt, which it is impossible to liquidate, must overwhelm her. The expences of the present war, which are enormous, must drain all her supplies—From the want of trade, famine must destroy her population. Her only chance is, that a war with Britain, may unite her jarring politics, recruit her treasures, and that the famished Jacobins may have an opportunity of fattening on the plenty of old England.

“ Tom Paine,” however, the ministerialists assure us, “ wishes to blow up a war between England and France;” and I believe them—but is he an authority you would wish to take? Is he a guide that you would wish to follow?

“ But

“ But the German Powers wish us to co-operate with them in the conquest of France”—And the reason is obvious—*It is our money that must pay them.* Remember that you can only act by sea, and that the rest of the military operations will simply consist in a *transfer of your money into the pockets of needy Germans,* or rather into the pockets of their *beggarly Princes.*

“ Oh ! but our *good and generous* allies the Dutch are to be injured in their commerce—The Scheldt is to be opened—And we are bound by treaty.”

With respect to the *value* of a Dutch alliance, I confess myself, as a plain citizen, unable to discover it. I have found innumerable instances in History, where the Dutch have been obliged to us, but not one single fact which proves that we have ever been obliged to them—They have rivalled and undermined us in commerce, they have sold us in war. They massacred our
merchants

merchants at Amboyna, and they plundered our trade, and afforded our enemies an Asylum at St. Eustatia. If you will be at the trouble of reading the sensible pamphlets of Dean Swift, you will find that while we were fighting their battles they committed depredations upon us; and that the *Dutch* and the Duke of Marlborough were the only gainers by wars, which cost us millions upon millions, and in consequence of which we smart under the oppression of taxes to the present moment.

Where was Dutch *goodness*, where was Dutch *generosity* in the last war? Where was the obligation of treaties then? In the name of common sense look at their conduct in that business, and then determine whether they deserve any favour at your hands?

It is the opinion of the most intelligent merchants, that the opening of the Schelde would be of the greatest advantage to the British commerce—It would introduce your

C

manufactures

manufactures into countries from which it has been the Dutch policy to exclude them—It would bring into your own treasury and into your own pockets those taxes and commissions which now go to aggrandize a Rival. The question then briefly is—Shall the commerce of Great Britain be sacrificed to the Dutch?

“ Ay but the faith of treaties,” say the ministers. Suffer me to explain to you, Gentlemen, from the evidence of history, and from Dr. Johnson (whom as a real friend to Government, I can never lose sight of) what *treaties* are. Treaties are not laws—they are selfish compacts often entered into by Princes merely for their private and interested views, in which the *people* have commonly no share; and which are always broken through at the pleasure or caprice of the Prince? Query. Ought the *people* then to be bound by them, when manifestly disadvantageous?

“ In

“ In forming stipulations,” says Dr. Johnson, “ the Commissaries are often ignorant, and often negligent. The weaker part is always afraid of requiring explanation, and the stronger has always an interest in leaving the question undecided. Thus will it happen, without great caution on either side, that after long treaties, the rights that had been disputed are still open to controversy.”

What became of the treaty, which, they say, guaranties the shutting up of the Schelde, when in the year 1780 we went to war with the Dutch, because they afforded shelter to the Americans, and supplied them with naval stores?—Shall Kings and Statesmen sport with treaties without censure; and shall the *people* only be the sufferers by them?

Nay the most intelligent Speakers in the late debates, declared their doubts as to the existence of such a treaty; and the most enlightened Statesman of the present day

But

C 2

affirmed

affirmed, with his usual manliness and good sense, that if *such a treaty did exist, and it was a bad one*, it ought to be broken.

Two questions here inevitably present themselves. If a treaty only exist between the monarchs, and be not sanctioned by the Legislature, can it bind the nation however disadvantageous to the commerce and interests of a country? If this be the case, the Executive is above the Legislative power in this instance, and may bind the nation even to the most destructive and unconstitutional acts. Again—If a treaty be sanctioned by the Legislature (which by the way is seldom the case) is it to be understood to be of *eternal duration*, or is it to suffer alteration, like all sublunary things, from time and circumstances? If this question be resolved in the affirmative, then the present king of Denmark may revive any obsolete treaty made with Canute, Alfred, or any of their predecessors.

“ But

“ But the increasing power of France is to be dreaded.” This I have partly answered. The ministers know and say “ that the present state of things in France cannot be permanent ;” they assert that “ the present mob Government will never be able to form itself into any thing like a regular system”— And I believe their assertion. But let them be consistent—Is this a power to be dreaded—Is this a power which is likely long to maintain an influence? I once more repeat, and upon the best grounds, that nothing but our imprudent interference can give them union, or can retard the French republic in its progress to dissolution.

When Providence inclosed the British nation in an island, and marked its limits by the strong barrier of the ocean, it afforded us a most salutary lesson against Continental wars, against Continental connexions: a lesson which we have never neglected, but to repent of, and for the neglect of which we
have

have shed tears of blood, and squandered oceans of wealth. Is there a man among you who can believe that if we leave the French unmolested, they will dream of coming hither? What Quixotism then, what madness to intrude ourselves into a quarrel, where we have not the least concern!—And what is the pretext? Why truly—That the city of Amsterdam may enjoy the sole navigation of the Schelde, to the exclusion of the city of London.

Is it, or is it not, owing to the predominance of Prussian politics in our cabinet that such absurdities are entertained there?—Or are we in this instance to consult our own interests, or those of Prussia?

Much more might be urged upon these topics, but as brevity is my object, I shall confine myself to two points. I shall in the first place cursorily mention the *possible*, and secondly the *certain*, consequences of this ruinous measure.

The

The British nation enjoys at this moment an unparalleled degree of opulence and prosperity. Its trade extends to the remotest parts of the earth, and its power, while under the direction of *wise* councils, is and will be acknowledged by every nation—But by persisting in folly, how soon may circumstances be totally changed? It is *possible* that your fleets may meet with *resistance*; it is possible that even *British money*, may *not render* your German allies invincible—As they have been beaten with every appearance in their favour, they may continue to be worsted. It is possible that if you provoke the French, they may be tempted to seize upon Holland—It is possible that a crusade of enthusiasts, in the cause of what they term liberty, may embark for Ireland, and plant the fatal tree of democracy, in Cork or Dublin. It is *possible* that the overpopulation of France may disembody itself even upon the coast of England; it is possible

ble that these Republicans and levellers, of whom we have heard so much, may join the standard of invasion; and it is *possible*, that the numbers of the disaffected in England may be more *numerous* than the ministry *really* believe, though they hold them forth even now as formidable—In that case we shall not have to lament with Mr. Burke, “that the age of chivalry is gone,” but we shall have to lament the loss of something infinitely more valuable—We shall have to lament, the loss of a Constitution which cannot be too highly esteemed; we shall have to lament, the subversion of property; the violent overthrow of our excellent civil and religious establishment; the prevalence of the mob, massacres, assassinations, and the dregs of the people, exalted to the superior stations.

The *certain* consequences are, an increase of debts; an increase of taxes—*Taxes, taxes, taxes*, as Lord Lansdowne expressed it, will continue to be extorted with unlimited cruelty from the hard hands of the poor. Our
friends

friends and relations will be lost in battle—
 Our trade will not only be the prey of the
 French, but of the Americans, of every pi-
 rate in short that chuses to fight under French
 colours—Our manufactures will be at a stand
 —Our funds will be depreciated; our ex-
 pences inevitably raised above our income—
 and all this for what? Why *that the City of*
Amsterdam, our valued friends the Dutch, may
enjoy the exclusive navigation of the Schelde.

The means of avoiding these accumulated
 Evils are obvious, We are at PEACE—Let
 us cultivate it. We enjoy unprecedented
 prosperity—Let us not wantonly throw it
 away. The Minister will not *dare* to in-
 volve you in war, unless you are unwari-
 ly drawn in to lend him your countenance.
 When once engaged, remember there is
 no limiting the continuance or the conse-
 quences of a war. Resist therefore the insidi-
 ous efforts of venal Magistrates to draw from
 you a pretended sanction. Remonstrate against

D

the

the measure, and you *will* be heard. Say only we enjoy at present peace, liberty and happiness; we do not wish our sunshine to be unnecessarily over cast, nor absurdly to embark upon troubled waters, merely that *Amsterdam may enjoy the exclusive navigation* of the Schelde.

If our sufferings in the late war with America, which I believe a little caution and prudence might have enabled us to avoid, are not sufficient to instruct us, let us at least take a useful lesson from the history of a neighbouring country: the nation which is now the wretched victim of anarchy, and the monarch who before this issues from the press, has probably breathed his last upon a scaffold, owe their ruin indubitably to their injudicious interference in a political dispute in which they properly had no concern.

F I N I S.

